

*Em Gallaudet*

# ADVANTAGES TO THE DEAF

OF THE

“GERMAN” SYSTEM

IN AFTER LIFE.



## A PAPER

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BY

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IN the first place let me thank those who have called together this most important International Congress for having allowed me, although not a teacher, to contribute a paper in connection with the Education of the Deaf. To those to whom I am unknown it may be well to state that I have never been connected with the profession nor have I ever been in any way pecuniarily interested in any school or institution. The interest awakened in my wife and myself was through an only child having lost hearing when very young. Before that we had, in common, alas, with the great bulk of mankind, never devoted any special attention to the condition or education of the deaf. Finding how bitterly opposed the advocates of speech and signs were to each other in England, we determined to see for ourselves in other countries how far the advantages of the one system surpassed the other beyond the school career and after institution life had been ended; for the "German" system had not been long enough at work in England for the effect on its pupils in after life to be apparent.

In order to avoid the chance of confusion I define the terms used in this paper as follows :—

"German" system.—That which is based on articulation and lip-reading.

“French ” system.—That which is based on a system of signs.

“Combined ” système.—That which is based on a system of signs with a certain amount of articulation taught as an accomplishment.

It may be well to note here that when, in 1872, we set out on our tour of inspection, which included England, America, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, France and Scotland in the order named, we naturally leant to the system most prevalent in our country, viz.: the “French ” system of signs.

From the above it may seem not unnatural that I should be asked to give the result of our enquiries as an answer to the first of the special questions in the programme of your Congress, viz. :—

“Will the deaf mutes taught by articulation forget when they leave school the chief part of the learning acquired there? And will they, when conversing with hearing people, prefer using gestures and written language to articulation? If this reproach has any truth in it, to what must this state of things be attributed, and by what means can it be remedied?”

My answer is that the deaf, *toto-congenital* as well as others, who have been properly “taught by articulation” do not “forget, when they leave the school, the chief part of the learning acquired there,” nor do they “prefer using gestures and written language to articulation.” You will notice

that I have emphasized the word “by”—“*by* articulation.” On this rests the whole difference between the pure “German” system, with its excellent results; and the many degrees of the “Oral,” or “Articulation” system, which is really the “Combined” method, with its disappointing results. It is this teaching articulation instead of teaching *by* articulation—teaching articulation, *i.e.*, as an extra, as a subject, as a lesson, instead of making articulation the channel through which all other knowledge should be imparted—which is so often mistaken for the pure “German,” or Speaking, system.

I have examined many schools on so-called “Oral” systems, or which have professed to give all the advantages to be obtained from the “German” system, where articulation was taught only half an hour a day; and we saw some schools where this “extra” lesson was given only on alternate days.

Compare this with all the knowledge the school-room can afford imparted through articulation, and all intercourse at play and at meals carried on in the same way, and you will then see that to those taught under the “German” system speech and lip-reading are their natural language, the language of their country, of hearing persons and of themselves. What wonder then that they should use it in after life? The wonder, indeed, would be if they did not. Whereas those to whom articulation has only been an extra, will never treat it as their natural language. It will be as a foreign language so taught is to

hearing children. What wonder then that the deaf, thus instructed, should in after life prefer to be ranked as deaf-mutes and use gestures or any other method rather than the lame, halting speech, which to them has always been unpleasant—a task—and in which they have never felt at home. Add to which, under these systems, lip-reading, or the art of understanding the speech of others, is little cared for.

The “reproach” mentioned in your question to which this Paper is an answer is wholly undeserved by the “German” system and those educated under it, but is richly merited and applies with irresistible force to the many degrees of “Oral” and articulating methods which have signs or manual alphabet as their base, and which are practised by those inimical to the system in its purity. Teachers and advocates of these systems bring the failure of their pupils to keep up, or to use, speech in after life as an argument against much time in the education of the deaf being devoted to speech; whereas when rightly acquired it is the most precious gift the deaf can receive, as proved by the fortunate pupils of good “German” system schools.

As a striking instance of the above may be mentioned the case of the School Board for London who have yielded, except in one school, to their Inspector’s views, as published by him in 1879, as follows:—  
 “During thirty years of practice on both systems I have found that articulation and lip-reading can only be used as the sole medium of communication for

educational purposes in a very few instances—not more than five per cent.”

This well-known English teacher has thus, throughout the schools for the poor in the metropolis of England, caused the practical rejection of the “German” system, which he does not understand, has never tried, and the results of which he has had no opportunity of seeing, because his own system of “Oral” teaching has, as he tells the world, so signally failed.

And now, with your kind permission, I purpose to illustrate the foregoing by a few examples taken from among the many we saw for ourselves of persons who had been educated at schools and institutions for the deaf in various countries. We saw lads and girls, young men and young women, middle-aged men and middle-aged women. We saw them as apprentices, workmen, masters, or those who had no profession, either at home, at their work, in their houses of business or in society.

In our intercourse with teachers of the “French” and “Combined” systems we had been repeatedly assured that all the successful cases we should meet with of old pupils able to converse and lip-read would be those who had partial hearing or who had learned to speak before loss of hearing—in fact, the semi-mute or the semi-deaf. To prove the truth or otherwise of this almost universal assertion, we visited *only toto-congenital* cases; and, to make the test more severe, we took care never to enquire where we could

see any old deaf pupils until we were ready to go and see them, lest they should have been prepared to receive us. This again we did to meet objections urged by teachers of the "French" and "Combined" systems. We are glad for the sake of the incredulous that we took these precautions, though, as we went on and found how unnecessary they were, we often felt ashamed of ourselves for having been so suspicious. The contrast was most marked between those taught under the "German" system, with whom we conversed by word of mouth, and those who had been taught under the "French" system, unable to converse with us who were unacquainted with signs and the manual alphabet, and whose attempts at writing were most difficult and in many cases impossible to understand owing to the language of their country being to them a foreign language. That the language of their country will ever be thus, even to the most highly educated, if taught on the inverted order of the sign language, will be admitted by even the staunchest supporters of those systems. Dr. E. M. Gallaudet acknowledged this to me, and said that I might mention that even one so highly gifted by nature and education as his own mother never, even in later years, could be said to have lost in her writings all "deaf-mutisms."

The result of our personal intercourse with the deaf who had been taught under the "German" system was encouraging beyond anything we had dared to hope; true, we never met with anyone whom



we could not have told from a hearing person, but we saw men and women of all ranks, and under a great variety of circumstances, and we were able in all cases to understand their speech and to be understood in return by their reading from our lips. We saw, in fact, persons able to get through the world comfortably by means of speech and lip-reading. For instance, amongst those we visited were some apprentices ; one was not a good specimen, for he stammered, as did also the hearing members of his family, yet we could understand him, and he readily read from our lips. His master said, quite crossly, in reply to the delight we expressed at the lad being able to make himself understood by speech (it was one of the first cases we had seen), "He speaks a great deal too much ; he is always talking with his fellow apprentice."

Take another instance. We saw a dressmaker who had the leading business in one of the smaller German capitals. She was rather shy of talking about herself at our first interview. 'This came to the knowledge of her lover, who begged we would pay his betrothed another visit, which we did, escorted by him. The meeting was most amusing : he took her roundly to task for having appeared to so little advantage in the morning ; and, after some lively sparring—rattled off between them just as though both, instead of one, had been hearing persons—we chimed in, and had a long and very pleasant conversation with the deaf dressmaker. She assured us, and this was confirmed by enquiries

we made, that in following her occupation the only means of communication between herself and those who employed her were articulation and lip-reading; she never had recourse to writing; finger-talking and signs she did not understand.

A happier, brighter and more contented woman than this dressmaker no hearing person could have been.

We were much struck with the marked contrast between those able to use speech and those unable to do so. Those able to use speech were so much more like hearing persons, so much more able to mix with others and hold their own in the world. They also seemed so much brighter, happier and more intellectual. This applies to those who had been at school an equal time, but not taught on the same system, and not to those exceptional cases of bright intellect and long school culture which are to be seen in some of the American sign schools, who have enjoyed two, three, and even four times as much school life as the majority of pupils on the "German" system are allowed.

Now we will pass to an instance or two to shew that it is not necessary that the deaf should remain long at school, however desirable it may be that they should do so, nor is it by any means necessary that they should have exceptional ability in order to use and keep up speech in after life. We were assured by the director of a large school, where there was an average of sixteen pupils to each teacher, that he had

had pupils only able to remain four years at school, and whose speech he feared would have been lost, who had come to see him in after years, not only with their speech not lost, but much improved ; and this we saw for ourselves in many instances. Nor is this really to be wondered at, when it is remembered that those taught on this system have but one means of communication, and that is language.

The following case is inserted here to shew that the education given on the "German" system is good, is valued, and made good use of in after life. We saw a poor woman living with an aunt. She had left school some twelve years, and lived in a part of Germany where one of the many *patois* prevailing in that country was spoken. When we first arrived at the house the aunt was out, and we saw the deaf woman, and an old woman who said she lived in the same house. On our enquiring from her if she were in the habit of talking to her deaf companion, and whether the latter understood her well, she answered both questions in the affirmative, and we soon saw for ourselves that this was the case, as they talked together easily in our presence. By-and-by the aunt came in, a regular old gossip, and chattered away as fast as possible, and when talking to her niece spoke with equal rapidity, yet the latter appeared to have no difficulty in understanding her. My wife, though a very fair German scholar, was several times at fault, by reason of the dialect spoken, as was even the German lady who acted as my interpreter ; more

than once, when such was the case, they asked the deaf niece, who interpreted the *patois*—indeed she seemed equally at home in speaking German to the ladies and the *patois* to those around her. She was a seamstress, was able to go out to houses and take her orders; was quite independent, going marketing for herself, and doing all the shopping for her aunt, and shewed us, with evident satisfaction, her book-keeping and accounts. A hearing woman in the same neighbourhood, who kept a small linendraper's shop, and was mother of a deaf girl, told us she had never known any of the old pupils who had not kept up their speech after they had left school, though she was acquainted with many, and had had good opportunities of judging.

Not to weary you with cases I will only add one more of the very many one might mention, viz. that of a working tailor. The man was not in when we went to see him. He was in court giving evidence against a thief who had stolen a hat from his master's shop. We had not to wait long, however, before he returned; and very pleased his master was that through his deaf workman's testimony the thief had been convicted. We found that this *toto-congenital* deaf workman had given all his evidence *vivâ voce* in open court, and had stood the test of examination and cross-examination without any other means of communication being used than word of mouth.

The cases hitherto mentioned have been all taken

from one class of life, because I have been most anxious that it should be appreciated how specially good and practical the “German” system is for the poor.

We saw, however, as before mentioned, persons of varied stations in life. We met ladies in society. We saw merchants who were able to carry on their business by word of mouth and correspondence. And in several cases we met with persons taught on this system who were not only proficient in their own tongue, but had acquired sufficient knowledge of other languages to enable them to travel for business or pleasure in foreign countries. It will be seen that our journeyings led us to visit many of all classes who had left school, some many years, and the result of our investigations conclusively proved—I am speaking of the majority, and not of exceptional cases on either side—

1st. That even the *toto-congenital* deaf taught by articulation do not forget when they leave school the chief part of the learning acquired there.

2nd. That they do not, when conversing with hearing or deaf people, prefer using gestures and written language to articulation.

3rd. That the reproach mentioned in the question to which this paper is an answer only applies to pupils and teachers of spurious and imperfect forms of articulation teaching, not to the pure “German” system.

In conclusion, let me urge that this system is of

such practical value to the poor, and to those who have to make their way in after life, that it cannot be too generally adopted.

To the rich, who can be kept at school as long as desired, who can continue their education after having left school, who have no necessity for battling with life, who are not desirous of mixing much in general society, and who have those around them who will for their sakes learn their peculiar means of communication, such as signs and the manual alphabet, it matters comparatively little on what method they are taught. Amongst the great variety of systems we have seen, there is not one incapable, under such exceptional circumstances, of turning out pupils happy and intellectual, though dumb as well as deaf, and, therefore, much restricted in their intercourse with the great mass of mankind.

Those, however, who are not rich form the vast majority of the deaf, and, therefore, the vast majority of schools should be on the system best suited to their needs. That the "German" is that system, giving as it does to the deaf not only speech but the power to use and understand speech, I trust this paper, whatever its defects, may have helped to prove. If my wife and I have not had the special training which the writers of most of the other papers have had, at least we have had no prejudices of education, profession or caste to get rid of; prejudices which are often met with in the minds of those who, on subjects outside their profession, have clear

and impartial judgment. We, at any rate, had nothing to gain or lose by our investigations, except the truth. Our object was to find—(1) What was best for own child. (2) What was best for the majority of the deaf.

We came to no doubtful conclusion, and so sure were we of the result, that we started “The Society for Training Teachers of the Deaf and for the Diffusion of the ‘German’ System in the United Kingdom,” of which I have the honour to be the Honorary Secretary, and whose Acting Secretary and Principal are writers of papers at this great Congress. True, things move slowly in England; the State gives us no help, and we have lately had a succession of bad harvests, but we will not rest until in our own land at least the deaf poor have the blessing of the system best suited to their wants.

May the result of this International Congress be, as I feel very hopeful that it will, the spreading, by GOD’S blessing, of a like benefit far and wide throughout the civilized countries of the world.

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